

The Missing Peace? Global-Regional Partnerships in Africa



Richard Lappin 31st May 2016

Conflict and Security

UN peace operations have reached unprecedented levels of cost, complexity and risk – and its operational focus is clear. Nine of the **16 current UN peacekeeping** missions are in Africa, almost 50 per cent of its 125,000 personnel come from African Union (AU) states, and more than 80 per cent of them are deployed in Africa. At a cost of more than \$8 billion, and confronted with intractable and hostile conflicts within states and organized crime and terrorism across states, there are many ways in which peace operations can be improved. The strengthening of global-regional partnerships may be the most promising.



This is a view increasingly put forward by the UN. On 24 May, the Security Council (UNSC) **commended the AU's** contribution to peacekeeping and its ongoing cooperation with the UN. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, described the AU as its “most important partner”. Indeed, the hybrid UN-AU mission to **Darfur**, the UN-approved AU mission to **Somalia**, and joint efforts to de-escalate tensions in **Comoros**, have all demonstrated the value of collaborative action.

Although not a new idea – regional arrangements are foreseen in the UN Charter and the AU and UN have held annual consultations for a decade – efforts are intensifying. Recent reviews of UN **peace operations** and **peacebuilding architecture**, the Secretary-General's “**Partnering for Peace**” report, the **Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping**, and last month's **World Humanitarian Summit**, have all made the case for deepening global-regional partnerships for peace, particularly in Africa.

For their part, the AU has taken considerable strides in demonstrating credibility as a reliable partner. The adoption of a **roadmap for 2016-2020** to operationalise their peace and security architecture signals a move away from ad-hoc responses towards a more strategic position. Impressive progress has also been made in developing a readily-deployable **standby force**, a key instrument that has long evaded UN reform.

The argument for regional partnerships is persuasive and the AU is seen to hold several comparative advantages, including better understanding of the local triggers of violence, greater political leverage in the neighbourhood, and logistical and financial advantages due to closeness. Proximity may also foster a more timely resolution due to

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concerns that political and economic instability may spill over borders. On a global scale, a stronger AU may also free-up valuable UN resources to focus on unfolding crises in the Middle East, provided **UNSC gridlock** can be broken.

Recalibrating the UN-AU relationship from one traditionally based on rudimentary capacity-building to one of genuine partnership is politically sound but operationally vague. Standard operating procedures need to be formalized and the mandate of the UN-AU Joint Task Force strengthened. A new framework agreement would help maximise each organization's comparative advantages and serve as a blueprint for other regions. Given Africa's dominance on the UNSC agenda, adding a permanent AU representative to the Council might also be considered.

More fundamentally, the thorny issue of financing must be addressed. To carry a greater peacekeeping burden, the AU needs predictable funding. AU states recently **committed to financing 25 percent of the costs** of African peace operations (up from less than 5 percent) and have called for assessed contributions from the UN peacekeeping budget to be available on a standing basis. The former is promising but the latter is unlikely due to UNSC fears of precedent and loss of control. In the short-term, the appointment of the experienced **Donald Kaberuka** as High Representative for the AU Peace Fund will help mobilise funds, but this does not diminish the pressing need to find a sustainable mechanism that includes voluntary, assessed and bilateral modalities. As a long-term donor, the **EU** ought to be included in this arrangement.

Irrespective of the insignia, other longstanding reservations must be addressed. Concerns linger about the clarity of mandates, command structures, and rules of engagement, while parallel efforts to strengthen conflict prevention tools, invest in political solutions, and avert peacekeeper abuses must continue. The disquieting divide between those that pay for missions and those that supply soldiers remains. Genuine partnership requires greater sharing not only of costs but also technical expertise, skilled personnel, and specialised equipment. The UN must also closely monitor interventions by regional forces to ensure that potential conflicts of interest are not exploited and tensions not exacerbated.

Yet despite these challenges, the trend towards global-regional partnerships ought to be encouraged. Its potential to provide timely, contextualized and cost-effective interventions can help bridge the UN's debilitating capability-expectations gap. If inter-institutional reform can keep pace, this may prove to be a missing piece in the puzzle of international security.

Author profile



Dr Richard Lappin holds a PhD from the University of Leuven on post-conflict democracy assistance, as well as an MSt in International Human Rights Law from the University of Oxford. He has worked on human rights and democracy assistance programmes throughout the world.

Citations

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Helene NGUYEN CISSE

January 24, 2017 at 9:37 pm

very interesting and encouraging for an effective partnership in peacekeeping operations
ECOWAS last experience in the Gambia, even if not related to peace keeping is an example of strengthened regional action and cooperation for a common goal

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